

Petersfield Urban District Council

Copy

Annual Report.  
of the Medical Officer of Health  
for the Year 1895

To the Chairman and Members  
of the Petersfield Urban District Council.

Gentlemen:-

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1895 the Urban Sanitary District of Petersfield was, by order of the County Council, extended so as to include a further portion of the parish of Buriton, situate in the tithings of Lower Weston and Lower Hursted and the portions of the parishes of Buriton and Sheet within the enlarged Sanitary District were united and amalgamated with the Parish of Petersfield.

By this alteration the area of the Urban District was enlarged from 526 to 1530 acres, and 56 houses were added to the 533 existing in the District before the extension of its boundaries. The population was estimated to the middle of 1895 at 2900. The newly added portions are not connected with the main sewers, nor have they the public water supply of the town.

During the year 59 births and 43 deaths were registered in the Urban District. In 1894 the births numbered 57 the deaths 44.

The births were equivalent to an annual birth rate of 20.38 per 1000, the average birth rate in England and Wales for the last fifty years being 33.8 per 1000







The birth rate in the district was exceptionally low in 1894 and 1895 but both it and the marriage rate have been declining in the country generally for several years.

The deaths were equivalent to an annual death rate of 14.8 per 1000, but of the 43 deaths registered in the district, 8 were those of persons not belonging thereto. 7 of these occurred in the Union Infirmary and 1 was that of a visitor from Brighton.

Deducting these we get a corrected total of 35 deaths equivalent to an annual death rate of 12 per 1000, the average death rate for England and Wales for the decennial period 1882-91 being 18.78.

This low death rate is the more satisfactory following as it does, low rates in the two preceding years, the corrected death rates in this district for 1893 and 1894 being 14.3 and 13.7 respectively.

Of the 43 deaths 10 occurred in children under 5 and 14 in persons over 70 years of age. Of these latter 6 had exceeded 80 years.

The deaths under one year of age numbered 8 which is equivalent to a death rate of 138 per 1000 births registered.

This is apparently a rather high Infant Mortality, but it is unsafe to draw conclusions from statistics, when dealing with small numbers. If we take the three years 1893 1894 and 1895 we find that the deaths under one year in this district were equivalent to a death rate of 87 per 1000 births registered. For the whole of the County of Southampton







the corresponding death rate was 116 in 1893 and 95 in 1894.

5 deaths were attributed to Zymotic disease viz. 2 to Diphtheria and 3 to Influenza giving a death rate of 1.7 per 1000 from this class

Influenza which became epidemic in the winter of 1889-90 and which prevailed with more or less <sup>severity</sup> for the four following years, shewed a marked abatement in 1895; though three deaths were referred to this as the primary disease, the number of cases has been relatively small.

The exceptional cold of January and February and the unusual heat of the summer months produced no appreciable effect on the health of Petersfield, the deaths registered in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarters of 1895 being 21 as compared with 25 and 22 in the corresponding periods of 1893 and 1894.

On February 17<sup>th</sup> I received a Notification of a case of diphtheria in the Station Road. The origin of the disease was obscure. Apparently there had been no contact with an infected person and the sanitary arrangements were good. During the long frost however the public water supply was cut off by the freezing of the service pipes and the family had drunk water from a neighbouring well. The case was bacteriologically examined and was pronounced undoubted Diphtheria. The patient (an only child) was isolated, the premises thoroughly disinfected after his recovery, and no further cases occurred.

Towards the end of October two more cases of Diphtheria occurred in a cottage on the Borough







Hill and both proved fatal. The children were (as far as was practicable) isolated, the premises disinfected immediately after the death of the second child, and the remaining children of the family were kept from school until after the Christmas holidays.

Notwithstanding the continual improvement in sanitary arrangements, the results of which are seen in a progressively declining death rate, Diphtheria is more prevalent than ever, and the deaths caused by this disease show a tendency to rise year by year. Doubtless many cases are now certified as Diphtheria which were formerly registered as Croup, Putrid Sore throat &c but even with this allowance, the rise which has taken place is only partially accounted for. The increase is mostly among children of school age and has been attributed by Dr. Thorne Thorne and others to the increased aggregation of children in schools since the passing of the compulsory Education Acts.

It is probable that many cases of Diphtheria run a mild course throughout, and are considered simple <sup>sore</sup> throats; the children affected by them are sent to school and communicate the disease to others.

In this connection it may be mentioned that microscopic examination has shown that the Diphtheria organism may be present in the throats of people, who have been in contact with the disease, but have not themselves taken it; and again that, though in the majority of cases of Diphtheria, the patient may be allowed to mix with the healthy







three weeks after the membrane has disappeared from the throat, yet in a few cases the bacillus has been detected as long as five weeks after the throat has been clear of membrane.

These facts show.

The necessity for prolonged isolation in this disease; the importance of preventing the return to school of children from an infected house, until all reasonable chance of their conveying the disease has past, and perhaps the expediency of warning parents against sending their children to school when unwell and especially when suffering from sore throats. A case of Typhoid Fever was notified to me on April 16<sup>th</sup> in College St. The house in which it occurred was in fairly sanitary condition, and the public water supply was laid on; on account however of the frequent turbidity and discolouration of the town water, well water was frequently used in its place. This was found on examination to contain a considerable amount of chlorides indicating sewage contamination. The usual precautions were taken to prevent the spread of the disease and no further case occurred.

On February 14<sup>th</sup> a manure pit in Sussex Rd was inspected. The pit adjoined the east end of the Brown Inn and sloped downwards toward the foot pavement. It was neither cemented nor drained, the liquid contents partly soaked into the ground and partly ran over the footpath into the road. Its removal was recommended and carried out.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup> in conjunction with Mr Chadwick







I inspected the Heath cottages and the adjoining premises, which were reported to be in an insanitary condition. The water supply for the six cottages belonging to Mrs Pay was drawn in a bucket from a well eleven feet deep, which was steined and raised well above the ground in brick and cement, so that no surface washings could enter, but the hinged wooden lid covering it was worn and deficient so that foreign bodies could readily find their way into the well.

The occupants of the cottages said that dead rats and mice were occasionally drawn up in the bucket and when examining the well we found worms in the mud deposited at the bottom. The water was found to contain a large amount of organic matter and was unfit for consumption and as a matter of fact the cottagers had been for some time fetching their drinking water from Penn's Farm. The wells belonging to the two other cottages were not raised above the ground and consequently received all the surface washings with the result that the water was impure. It was recommended that these should be raised at least a foot above the ground and domed. The recommendation was carried out. It was suggested that the well supplying Mrs Pay's cottages should be cleaned out, covered with a stone and a pump placed over it. The well has been cleaned out and covered with a new wooden lid, but the latter part of the suggestion has not been acted upon. For the use of these cottages four closets were provided, the excreta being received in cesspools beneath, which were







from time to time cleaned out by the tenants. In May 1894 three cases of Diphtheria, two of which were fatal, occurred in one of these cottages. It was found then, that one of the cesspools had recently overflowed and contaminated the soil beneath the house. It was pointed out in the report that cesspits in such proximity to cottages were a standing danger to health, and should be abolished, portable receptacles, such as galvanized pails being substituted for them. The excreta pure or mixed with ashes could then be applied at short intervals to the gardens. This alteration has not yet been made. On August 1<sup>st</sup> I inspected two cottages in Moq's Mead recently erected by Mr John Gammon. The closets were provided with rectangular wooden boxes which received the excreta; these were periodically removed through a door at the back, and the contents mixed with ashes and placed on the garden. There was no automatic arrangement for throwing earth on the excreta, but the tenants attempted some deodorization with lime and earth.

The sink water passed into a cesspool built for the purpose and having an overflow pipe into the brook. In a town having a system of drainage it seems an anomaly to construct new cesspools, and it is to be regretted that the cottagers were not provided with water closets and connected with the main sewer.

On November 16<sup>th</sup> I inspected a hut in Sandy Lane The Heath occupied by Frederick Bowers. The hut consisted of a wooden frame, similar to that of a waggon head, covered with odd bits of







sacking, canvas &c. The hut was 16 feet by 6 and about 6 feet high. The fire was contained in an iron bucket from which the smoke escaped through a hole in the roof. The occupants were Frederick Bowers, his wife and four children and they had their beds on the bare ground. The hut was obviously unfit for human habitation and has been removed accordingly. I also inspected a van in an adjoining field occupied by John Griggs his wife and four children. The van was roomy had a fireplace and chimney four windows and was well raised above the ground. The family lived in the daytime principally out of doors, or under a rudely constructed hut and used the van for sleeping purposes only. The cubic space was insufficient but there was pretty free ventilation, and taking into consideration the fact that they lived practically in the open air, and appeared in robust health, I did not feel justified in saying that there was over-crowding to an extent injurious to health.

The slaughter-houses of Mr. Baker and Mr. Gander have been inspected during the past year and found generally satisfactory. It was suggested that the walls could be more effectually cleansed from blood if they were cemented to a height of four or five feet. The suggestion was readily assented to and has been duly carried out. The condition of the Market Square cannot yet be pronounced satisfactory. The asphalt laid down in 1894 on the South and West sides of the Square has worn into hollows, and the droppings of the cattle tethered to the railings







lodge in these and cause objectionable effluvia. It would be far better were the whole area of the Square concreted. It would then be possible to wash it thoroughly clean after the close of the Market. Now the ground between the different portions of concrete becomes saturated with manure, especially in wet weather, so that the smell of the Market lingers sometimes for days. 78 houses in the Town still depend on shallow wells for their water supply, and it is noteworthy that in two houses in which Diphtheria or Typhoid occurred in the past year, well water had been used for drinking though the public water supply was laid on. In one of these the reason alleged was that the town water was so often turbid and discoloured that they preferred the well water. It is a matter for regret that there should be cause for this complaint. A settling tank in which suspended matters would have time for subsidence, would materially improve the character of the water; and if lime or lime water were put into the tank previously to pumping as in Dr. Clark's process, suspended matters would be effectually precipitated together with the previously dissolved chalk and the result would be, I believe, a clear, soft wholesome water. Clark's process is inexpensive and has been for many years adopted in the Colne Valley Waterworks, and its economical value to householders in the saving of soap is a point not to be lost sight of.

The provision of an Isolation Hospital is a matter which ~~deserves~~ the serious consideration of your Board.







The Notification of Infectious diseases (a most valuable measure) is deprived of much of its usefulness, where there is no public institution to which infected persons may be removed, who cannot be properly isolated in their own homes. In a neighbouring district an outbreak of Diphtheria occurred in 1893 for which the Authorities were unprepared. Four temporary hospitals were hastily fitted up, but the outbreak had already assumed formidable proportions and 26 deaths resulted. Prompt isolation of first cases affords the best chance of limiting the spread of Infectious sickness.

I have the honour to be  
Gentlemen

Your obedient servant.

A. W. Leachman M.D. D.P.H.  
Medical Officer of Health

Petersfield, February 20<sup>th</sup> 1896



